

encourages us to use them in a different manner. Alabama failed to incorporate a moment of silence in its school day's activities because the motives were religious. Through Alabama's actions, other people were forced to use the shield and sword to protect their beliefs and confront those who wanted to challenge them. However, if a state would establish a moment of silence with no religious intentions, then the Supreme Court would allow the moment in which the children may choose to pray. Our nation has the blessing of a Constitution to keep government and our lives in balance and order. Within this Constitution, government has the responsibility to respect the religious practices of individuals. The Supreme Court has the challenge of interpreting and preserving the responsibilities that the Constitution originally established. The Constitution also grants the people of this nation with tools to protect and defend our rights. As Thomas Jefferson stated, "...religious liberty is the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights."<sup>41</sup>

## “COMMUNITY IS WHERE COMMUNITY HAPPENS”: OPPOSING VIEWS OF COMMUNITY IN AMERICAN HISTORY

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As the sense of community in America surrenders to increased geographical mobility and national culture, the study of community has become an integral part of interpreting American social history. Perhaps in an effort to re-create "ideal" communities of the past or simply as a way to learn more about social development, community studies have come to the forefront of the scholarly search for an understanding of the formation of America's social processes. Moreover, in the face of urban isolation and technological progress, Americans are searching for an identifiable and usable past. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists and geographers have used statistical data, demographics, and town and family records to reveal the development of community life and community relationships in 19th-century America.

Thomas Bender's discussion of community introduced the paradox of community as both an experience and as a place. He states that "as simply as possible, community is where community happens."<sup>1</sup> The essence of community, whether interpreted as a place or experience, though, is based on the notion of a social network marked by mutuality and emotional bonds.<sup>2</sup> The research examined in this essay supports these conclusions, especially those of John Faragher and Robert Dykstra. Both rely on local data combined with social and historical theory to create specific concepts of community.

1 Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 6.

2 *Ibid.*

of investigating open-country districts, explaining the system of relations that linked dispersed farming families to each other and to the larger society.<sup>15</sup> This theory gives credence to the active nature of the frontier as a whole. It shifts the rural communities from their position as static settlements to a more dynamic status.

There are three essential concepts to which these articles and their authors' views will be associated: whether the American rural experience was communal; whether webs of relationships existed in rural settlements; and whether the authors subscribe to the central-place theory. From a historiographical angle, the era in which the article was written, the type of data sought and used, and the ultimate goal and intention of the authors are all relevant in interpreting their research within a broader historical context.

Frederick Jackson Turner's view of both open-country settlements and webs of relationships held that they were detrimental to the advancement of American civilization, character and the progress of democracy on the frontier. Turner searched for an ideal western frontier through the individual rather than through community. While he did acknowledge the presence of a communal existence, ultimately the frontier was representative of the progress of American civilization and the American character through the individualistic behavior of pioneers on the frontier. The influence of the ever-changing frontier environment on these pioneers built character, aiding in the development of an ideal America.

His emphasis on the individual over community set Turner apart from contemporary historians like Dykstra and Faragher. He made little reference to the family or communal unit in the westward movement and settlement of the frontier. In Turner's era of great geographic expansion and industrial progress, stressing the singular, powerful, and self-sufficient frontier settler was a way to boast about the strength and virility of the American character. It was as much patriotism as it was history. His use of data, which primarily drew upon others' views of westward expansion rather than primary sources, revealed his intention of portraying the frontier and its inhabitants as a paragon of American integrity and democratic zeal.

Turner's frontier was dynamic, ever-changing and of importance in the creation and sustenance of American civilization and character. His community

5 Faragher, 235.

Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, Dykstra's book *The Cattle Towns* and Faragher's article "Open-Country Community: Sugar Creek, Illinois, 1820-1850," offer differing theories of community in the context of the American frontier. The broader social framework of their research is the undeniable presence of community in frontier America. All three argue that community did exist, but their opinions vary concerning its relative importance in the development of social relations both in towns and in rural "open-country" settlements. Also at stake is the force of the frontier and community in the development of American civilization and the American character. Their theories extend from Turner's dismissal of community in favor of individualism to Faragher's acceptance of communal patterns. Dystra's work bridges the two, applying elements of both Turnerian individualism and the associationalism of social history to his research. All these authors attempt to define the process by which settlers on the frontier endured the hardships of pioneering and struggled to create a meaningful life for themselves that extended beyond mere survival.

Faragher poses a question that is relevant to the arguments made by Turner and Dykstra as well: "To what extent has the American rural experience been communal?"<sup>3</sup> Community implies the interconnectedness and cooperation of like-minded people living in close proximity to each other and maintaining social, economic, religious and civic ties. Kenneth Lockridge describes these alliances as "webs of relationships," although his definition of the term related to village and town interactions and not the rural settlements that Faragher and other describe as open-country settlements.<sup>4</sup> To Faragher, open-country communities also had webs of relationships that helped connect rural residents to each other.

The larger context of this theory, to which Faragher and Dykstra subscribe, is the study of rural settlements which revolve around a central place containing social, civic, and religious goods and services. Faragher wrote that the "central-place studies of rural sociologists suggest that even dispersed farm families developed certain 'webs'," and that "central-place theory offered the possibility

3 John Mack Faragher, "Open-Country Community: Sugar Creek, Illinois, 1820-1850," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalistic Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, edited by Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 234.

4 *Ibid.*

was static, and, at its core, served only to handicap the pursuit of progress and civilization. Thus, the idea of the American rural experience being even remotely communal was the antithesis of his views. Furthermore, the central-place theories used by later historians have no merit in his research beyond merely helping to explain his idea of the rise and westward spread of democratic ideals across the United States.

In his 1968 book The Cattle Towns, Dykstra examined the rural farming communities that surrounded the cattle towns of Kansas as evidence of the intra-community relationship that connected the two settlements. In this way, he was addressing all three of the issues in question. The rural experience was indeed communal: entire towns were set up on the premise of acquiring great wealth and success from the sale of cattle on the Kansas frontier. The new and transient townspeople and the farmers already in place on the land became part of an extended web of relationships that involved interactions with each other on a regular and systematic basis. Each group had a central place that catered to their immediate needs, and each group could go outside their own center of community to procure goods and services from the other.

The farming settlements that surrounded the cattle towns in Kansas existed both before and after the zenith of the boom towns. While the towns were up and running, a give-and-take relationship existed between the grangers and the townspeople. The webs of relationships and cooperative attitude that existed in the outlying rural settlements were strong enough at times to tip the balance in town and country political elections as well as other civic decisions. Had these webs not been in place, the farmers would have lost a measure of their identity in the larger context of the economic and social structure of the cattle towns.

Dykstra's frontier and community, like John Mack Faragher's, were both dynamic. It was evident throughout Dykstra's analyses of the towns discussed that it wasn't just townspeople who had to adapt to changes in the environment, geography and larger social issues of the day. The surrounding farming communities had to adapt to changes in the towns and had to accommodate the fluctuating populations of both men and cattle. Their modes of production shifted as the needs of the towns changed.

In terms of these forced adjustments, Dykstra's research supported one of Turner's main points concerning community. The Turnerian individualism and anti-social attitudes of the cattlemen clashed with the communal and stable social patterns of the farmers. When the concepts of rural cooperation and the

"demands of settlement" are applied to Dykstra's Kansas cattle towns, the evidence suggests that the interaction between residents of the towns and the farmers was undeniably fragile and at times strained.<sup>6</sup> This information further supports Turner's theory of the difficulty in maintaining an actual community or sense of community in such a rapidly changing economic environment.

What is important to remember, however, is that Dykstra did support the notion of communal existence on the frontier. Furthermore, his research exposed this notion through an examination of local social interactions and central-place studies. Using contemporary sources such as local newspapers and correspondence, Dykstra achieved a well-rounded and thorough picture of the Kansas cattle towns and surrounding farm land. The second appendix of the book dealt exclusively with his research methodology and goals. In it he addressed his intention to discuss the town in terms of social processes which he defined as "the interaction of impersonal factors and human factors," and the "emphasis on two related and interacting themes: leadership and politics." He continued by stating that in the context of these themes, "decision-making lies at the heart of all things that impel a community through time."<sup>7</sup>

In his article, Faragher looked at Sugar Creek, Illinois, as an example of an open-country settlement and also examined the community as an example of the larger social phenomena of individualism and communalism. Both the frontier and the community were interpreted as dynamic in Faragher's research. His argument was thorough because of his acknowledgment that both are susceptible to change and alteration.

Faragher's application of the webs of relationships theory to Sugar Creek showed that these webs were indeed present and an essential part of the longevity of this and many other similar settlements throughout rural America. He studied in-depth the daily and cyclical activities of Sugar Creek, Illinois, and his thesis was simple: "Open-county settlements ... demonstrated the communal patterns usually attributed to nucleated villages alone.... Despite the absence of a village, the patterns of everyday life in Sugar Creek acted as constituents of community."<sup>8</sup>

6 Faragher, 234.

7 Robert R. Dykstra, The Cattle Towns (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 380-381.

8 Faragher, 237.

Faragher's materials included data about the demography, geography and social development of the farming households that grew up along the banks of Sugar Creek. He used manuscripts from Sugar Creek residents as well as community studies written by sociologists and other historians. Like Dykstra, his research did not reveal an ideal settlement that emphasized its communal nature and strength. Rather, he discussed the positive and negative aspects of living within the community. Faragher identified both those residents for whom living in Sugar Creek was financially and socially successful and those residents who stayed a short while and moved on to search for success elsewhere. His final paragraph discussed this and made an important point about the conclusions that all the authors drew from their research:

In Sugar Creek, community did not work to the benefit of all; rather, it was the device that allowed some men and women to succeed and prevail while others, the majority, failed and pushed on. The relative stability of Sugar Creek for the persistent owners was accompanied by high levels of mobility and shiftlessness for those who lacked the means to buy land. Depending upon one's viewpoint, depending upon which group among the settlers one studies, one may find either the geographic mobility and loss of community that have become the hallmarks of modern America, or the communal order of a traditional society.<sup>9</sup>

It is this presentation of both sides of the "community studies" argument that made Faragher's research so complete. His research isolated an area of settlement and studied it specifically as it related to some of the broader social themes and movements discussed by Turner, Dykstra and other historians. "In important ways communal elements retained much strength in the settlement of Sugar Creek, even in the context of a typically Turnerian environment."<sup>10</sup>

In light of the views of each of the above authors, a reiteration of Faragher's initial question: "To what extent has the American rural experience been communal?" seems an appropriate way to conclude this analysis. A case can be made for the idea that both Dykstra and Faragher studied locations that were clearly communal in nature while Turner chose to tackle the entire western frontier as his subject matter. They applied theories of central-place studies, open-country community, and associationalism to what was already in existence. The data they needed to support their ideas was all around them. While Turner chose to use only minimal sources of local contemporary information to

9 Faragher, 252.  
10 *Ibid.*, 251.

justify his theories, Dykstra and Faragher sought out as much local information as they could and interpreted it using a multi-disciplinary approach. Not only were broader historical themes and theories used as templates. So were sociological, economic and political themes. This method served to uncover as broad and accurate a version of these experiences as possible.

While Turner's research provided an overview of the progressive conquest and domestication of a poetic and ideal frontier, Dykstra and Faragher created in-depth and realistic analyses of specific places in American history. Their interpretations did not end at localism, though. By honing in on particular communities and examining intimate details of their existence, they interpreted a microcosm of social development that represents many of the broader social and economic themes of American history.